

Capital's Poor Folk To Go Camping Soon

Beautiful Chopawamsic Area Is Being Prepared as Vacation Site for Underprivileged Children and Their Mothers.

When summer heat gets the upper hand in Washington and the annual migration to more comfortable regions begins, the less fortunate children and their mothers of the District of Columbia will find retreat this year for the first time at Chopawamsic, a recreational area under development by Federal agencies on the Richmond Highway, 35 miles south of the Capital.

Welfare organizations and other co-operating agencies of Washington, acting through the National Capital Parks, will have entire charge of arrangements for year-long use of the area by underprivileged families of the District. Similar groups chosen from a population of more than 1,000,000 within a radius of 50 miles of the area, centered principally in Fredericksburg, Alexandria, and Baltimore, as well as Washington, will have use of the area. Cabins and recreational facilities will be ready about June 15, when the first groups of mothers and children will be taken to Chopawamsic for a two-week vacation in pleasant surroundings in the 15,000-acre tract of woods and streams.

Committee Forms To Run Resort.

A co-ordinating committee composed of representatives of various departments of the District of Columbia and social agencies will be set up to pass on application, arrange for transportation, make physical examinations, arrange the schedule for use of the area by various groups, and see that the general policies of the National Capital Parks are carried out. This committee will include representatives of the National Capital Parks, the Washington Council of Social Agencies, the Community Chest, the District of Columbia Police Department, and the co-ordinator of recreation in the District.

There are three camp sections at Chopawamsic: One for mothers and tots, one for girls and one for boys. They are about 5 miles apart, and each will have its own water and sewage system, showers, and telephones. Each group will consist of four units of seven buildings each, or 28 in all, with accommodations for 500 persons. The cabins, made of logs, are under construction and some of them are nearly finished. In each group there will be a leader's cabin, a central dining hall, five overnight cabins and a lodge. Each cabin will accommodate four persons, and the lodges will be used for social gatherings or winter week-end trips. Latrines, wash houses, service buildings and work shops will be provided.

Known technically as a "recreational demonstration area," the Chopawamsic project is financed by the land program of the Resettlement Administration as a demonstration in the better use of land unsuited to farming, and is being carried out jointly with the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior, which has charge of developing the recreational facilities.

500 WPA Men Working at Camp.

Approximately 1,000 workers, including the enrollees of three CCC camps and about 500 WPA men, are at work on the camping plots. It is estimated that when the area is thrown open to public use this summer its facilities will be about two-thirds complete.

Built of timber cut from the area, the camp buildings are of hardy construction, and are designed to accommodate four persons. Stone quarried from an old pyrites mine on the reservation and concrete are used for the foundations. Creosote is applied to the logs to give them finish and preserve the wood in naturalistic appearance. All cabins will be screened and provided with weatherproof shutters.

Recreation at Chopawamsic will be supervised to some degree, but will be as individual as possible. Although play fields will be provided, there will be no organized activities such as baseball or foot-

ball as carried out on city playgrounds. Miles of hiking trails are being laid out, and later there will be swimming facilities. Life at Chopawamsic will be on the "vacation in Maine" plan.

Water recreation will be provided at several artificial lakes. The first lake planned will be adjacent to the girls' camp group, where a masonry dam will impound the waters of a stream. The dam will have a length of 165 feet and a spillway nearly 30 feet high. A similar lake will be built later at the boys' camp.

Visitors to Chopawamsic will find much to engage their attention. Children will be taught to appreciate woodcraft and will be introduced to basketry, woodcarving, botany, geology and the study of birds. Young mothers will be able to study the proper care and feeding of children, receiving their instruction from a dietician and a pediatrician. The personnel of a permanent staff has already been chosen for the coming season.

The Chopawamsic area affords a great natural playground. Running through it are the north and south branches of Quantico and Chopawamsic creeks and several other smaller streams which flow toward the Potomac River. There are many springs, one of which—Old Stead—in the girls' camping area, has a year-round flow of 17 gallons a minute.

Extending through the area proper are four lobate ridges, more or less parallel, reaching 4 to 7 miles from the Richmond highway, and having an elevation of 20 to 400 feet. From the stream beds, half of the land slopes upward to rolling hills and table land, and the other half is rugged and steep, with gullies more than 100 feet deep.

The accessibility of Chopawamsic and its varied natural attractiveness make it particularly adaptable as a recreational area. The forest cover is young and includes fine specimens of valuable large white oak, with generous spread of red oak, black oak, chestnut oak, beech, walnut, hickory, tulip, sycamore, black gum, white and black ash, birch, iron wood and maple. Thick rows of pine are found here and there, and cedars, hemlock and holly are present in good quantity. Dogwood is prevalent, and fine, large, healthy laurel abounds over the hillside. About a dozen types of moss-covered rocks have been counted. Ferns are frequent, but poison ivy is extremely rare.

Stone Quarried For Camp Roads.

In the building operations, more than 100,000 feet of lumber has been cut, according to W. R. Hall, project manager, and two sawmills are kept busy. Stone quarried from the pyrites mine is also used for roadbed. Although it is not planned to build highways for automobile sightseeing parties, roads will be put in shape for those using the area under sponsorship of the social agencies.

Chopawamsic is regarded by the Federal authorities as a "problem area." The heads of families living in the area are lacking in adequate cash income and have been subjected to many hardships. There are 44 families living in the area at present, of whom 42 will move out. Thirty-three of these will arrange their own resettlement and nine will receive aid from the Government through the resettlement Administration. The families remaining consist of elderly persons who are given life use of the land as part of their contract to sell to the Government.

The area was named by the Indians, whose term for it means "at a small isolate lodge." Capt. John Smith is credited with having been the first trader in the area, in 1608. The first colonization was attempted in 1635 by three English partners who took over 30,000 acres around what is known as Brenton. The first to mine iron ore were a group of Germans in 1714.

The period from 1663 to 1740, saw the land cleared and plantations taking form along the river and creeks. These plantations became impoverished after the Civil War, and since that time there has been attack and abandonment on the problem of obtaining livelihood. Operation of the pyrites mine, which supported a population of considerable size, was abandoned in 1919, and from then on the people have found it hard to get along. The land is not good for farming and there is no other industry to support them.

Area Spreads Over Two Counties.

The area is situated in Prince William and Stafford counties, Virginia, and its center of population is near Joplin, five miles south and west of Dumfries, six miles west of Quantico, 17 miles southeasterly of Manassas, 20 miles north of Fredericksburg, and 70 miles north of Richmond. The climate does not differ materially from that of Washington. Fall and winter use of the area will be encouraged, including such activities as straw rides, barn dances, and square dances, in revival of general, wholesome country fun.

Development of the area is also helping the population of the neighborhood over some 100 square miles, through the employment of men in the WPA division working on the project. Only one member of a family is employed.

Government agencies in charge of the project believe that Chopawamsic will fill a need distinctly felt by a large part of the population of Washington and other nearby communities, and that they have selected an area which, while unproductive agriculturally, is unusually well suited to development for recreation. Chopawamsic was personally selected for development in the summer of 1934, by Conrad L. Wirth, assistant director of the National Park Service, after thorough investigation of all qualifying areas recommended by the National Capital Parks and Planning Commission. The project is supervised by the Third Regional Office of the National Park Service in Richmond.

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National Park Service Photo.

Poor boys and girls from the Nation's Capital are going to go camping this summer amid scenery like this, in the newly developed Chopawamsic recreational area. Federal agencies are preparing certain sections for the day excursionists, while Washington social agencies are constructing camp sites to take care of needy mothers and children at vacation time.